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Winterset

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Winterset

1

Other winters we had to climb
the plowed snow
at the neighborhood's dead end
to enter the oak savanna,
which wraps the northeast edge of lake
within its blighted, broken limbs,
to walk its trail of foot-mashed leaves.

But this winter, rain drizzled down
the piled-up snow before the city plows
could heap it higher than dog or deer
could leap clean to gain the quiet--
nightfall coming on as certain
as each of our neighbor's kitchen lights.

2

Then came the heavy wet snow to overstay
its welcome, wear out our patience
for that stillness in which nothing moves
except the sift of snow off rooftops
and the furnace plumes that rise, then drift
off into that wash of night
I'd strive for if I were a watercolorist.

Weeks of despairing cold--
a windchill that kills the stranded motorist
dithering, thigh-high,
through snowdrift toward a farmyard light.

3

In the city the homeless sleep beneath bridges
in cardboard hovels of quiet ingenuity,
while overhead commuters rumble home
from work--apparently unaware.

And the cold in the suburbs
deepens in the cradles of tire-rutted streets.

4

I go out late in the night before sleep
to start my Eurovan and let it run
while I walk the dog to the end of our street
where she pulls on her leash toward a wall
of plowed snow,
wanting to gain the quiet of the woods
and to scare up whatever she can
beneath the sickle-honed moon and stars.

But I am stopped by the cold,
more than the plowed-up snow that walls us out.

And for a moment . . .
that holy stillness in which nothing moves.

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